



U.S. Department of Agriculture, Animal & Plant Health Inspection Service

AdNotes

Minneapolis Business Site
March 2000

The Marketing and Regulatory Programs, (MRP) Board of Directors, chaired by Deputy Secretary Mike Dunn and composed of the Administrators of MRP agencies, recently approved timeliness standards for the various administrative support activities provided by MRP-Business Services (these can be found on the MRP-BS web site). The purpose of standards is to give customers an expectation of when work will be accomplished. As we adapt to the new standards, we intend to incorporate further measures of the quality of our performance as determined by the recipients of services.

In the Minneapolis Business Site, the initial service standards came from our employees. We sent the first draft to customers for comments and suggestions. The final version as approved by the Board, became effective January 1. We will report on our progress under the standards each quarter and post these results on our web site. Here in Minneapolis, we began using the standards three months early. We wanted to find out what problems we would face in meeting the turnaround goals and counting our work. We discovered that counting high volumes of work is a real challenge. After all, when we spend our time counting, we lose hours we would otherwise use to do work! So, we've already begun looking at streamlining and automation ideas for measuring our performance under the standards.

The good news is that using the measurements to report on our performance also provides an opportunity to identify weak areas or possible places to shortcut. Such efforts will help people in Minneapolis and our customers. Even after years of quality improvement planning, we still find barriers to performance, some of which are imposed on us and others which we create for ourselves. The standards of service is another incentive to tear down these barriers whenever possible. So, our objective is to get the most benefit as possible from the standards. If our results look bad, that just means the standards are challenging. If a standard is so undemanding that we meet it 100% of the time, it is not a good measurement.

Are there any particular aspects of working with Minneapolis that cause you trouble? Let me know and we'll examine them, then discuss possible changes with you. After you review the standards, you will be aware of our goals for timeliness. We don't expect 100% success, but it won't be for lack of effort. And, over time, we'll get better and better. Isn't that what work is all about?

David Gradick
Manager

Administrative Processes Training



For over a decade, we have been conducting a variety of administrative training sessions for our customers. There has been a great demand for each offering, and we often have a waiting list! We're now offering some new approaches to meet the needs of our diverse customer base.

The following are courses we have scheduled for FY 2000. There are a number of ways we can work with Program Managers to address their training needs. We are now conducting special sessions for individual programs; offering our general two-week session including participants from all the different programs and agencies we support; and we're reintroducing our Administrative Seminar for Program Managers course.

Administrative Workshop for VS Eastern States
Targeted Audience -- AVIC & ASA (1st Group)

March 20 - March 24
(In Raleigh, NC)

Annual Introduction to Administrative Processes
Targeted Audience -- Employees with administrative, financial, or human resources responsibilities:

May 1 - 5, May 8 - 12
(In Minneapolis)

Segment Administrative Workshop for AMS, F&V, PPB
Targeted audience --- Determined by Division

June 13 - June 15
(In Minneapolis)

Administrative Workshop for VS Eastern States
Targeted Audience --- AVIC & ASA (2nd Group)

July 17 - July 21
(In Raleigh, NC)

Administrative Systems Seminar for Program Managers
Targeted Audience ---Designed for Program Managers (i.e., field office managers, AVIC, SPHD, Assistants to, Regional Directors, Deputy Directors, etc.)

October 24 - 27
(In Minneapolis)

Administrative Workshop for PPQ Western Region
Targeted Audience --- Determined by Division

Date --- FY 2001
To be announced

If you're interested in a special session, or, have questions about any of the upcoming sessions please contact: **Pam Lyons**, Employee Development Specialist at Area Code **612-370-2238**, or, by e-mail at **pam.j.lyons@usda.gov**.

MRP-Business Services e-Business Expansion

In October 1999, our Minneapolis Business Site launched new personnel (PATs) and purchasing (PRISM) request and tracking systems. These systems can be used through Lotus Notes or our Web Site and have been very well received by our customers.

Expanding the capabilities of these systems is what we're up to now. Currently, PRISM takes a small purchase request through Lotus Notes or our Web Site and produces records, files, and e-mails for a purchase order. We are augmenting the basic PRISM system by integrating contracting, realty, telecommunications, and property acquisition processes with PRISM. This integration includes the Riverdale-Washington and Minneapolis Business Sites.

In the new system, field and headquarters staff will enter a request and based on their response and entries, the request will be delivered to the appropriate functional teams and locations. The plan is to load the new system with lots of communication and documentation capability, as well as easy-to-follow and simple-to-use screens. Templates are also planned for some of the more difficult requests to help communicate your needs clearly and concisely.

Our objectives of the expansion are ambitious, yet attainable:

- Involve the field and headquarters requesters in all phases
- Enter data once and use many times by many different people
- Improve service and communication among requesters, service providers, managers, etc.
- Streamline the process, eliminate steps through technology
- Integrate mandated actions along with requested information; increase consistency with procurement regulations
- Increase quality of service and include work output data
- Built-in performance and quality measures



Does any of this sound interesting or exciting to you? How can you get in on it?

If you have suggestions or would like to be part of our field/headquarters-user team, please let us know. There are lots of ways to participate: (1) Join our mailing list for reviews and comments on documented plans; (2) participate in design, test, implementation and training Teams; (3) tell us how you can help.

Contact Denise Barnes at “Denise.a.barnes@usda.gov” with your name, program, location, e-mail, fax, and phone and let her know how you’d like to participate.

Position Descriptions... Why Do We Need Them



We all have one, but why do we need one? What are we supposed to do with it? Who is responsible for ensuring it is accurate and up-to-date? These are just a few of the frequently asked questions about position descriptions, otherwise known as “PD’s”. The paragraphs below provide information that hopefully will answer all these questions.

What is a PD? -- A position description is an official record of the work assigned by management to an employee. This work is analyzed according to Office of Personnel Management classification standards, resulting in occupation, title, and grade determinations. An employee assigned to a position gets paid according to the grade of the position.

Why do You Need a PD? -- “To get paid” is perhaps the most important reason. All positions must be classified before an employee can be paid. PD’s can also be used to orient new employees about their duties. They are helpful in setting qualifications used to fill jobs as well as to promote employees.

Finally, the duties and responsibilities in a PD are used in developing performance standards for individual positions and in deciding on training courses for employees.

Who is Responsible for Preparing and Maintaining the PD?

Employees’ Responsibilities - All employees should have a copy of their position description and be familiar with its content. They should help maintain the accuracy of their job description by informing their supervisor of inaccuracies or omissions. Employees should also be responsive to invitations from their supervisors to participate in the writing of descriptions.

Supervisors’ Responsibilities -- The primary responsibility for position description accuracy rests with the supervisor. The supervisor is the one who is accountable for the assignment of work to employees, and for the expenditure of public funds used to pay the employee. The significance of this accountability is clearly indicated in the certification that the supervisor makes in signing the position description cover sheet.

The supervisor's responsibility for a job description does not end when a PD is written.

Supervisors should periodically review the job descriptions of all of their subordinates for accuracy and revise them to keep them current. Much of position description updating involves simply making job description changes that keep pace with technology, changes in agency policies, revised program emphasis, and related matters that affect how the agency does business and how the particular position functions. But, in some instances, supervisors may want to make revisions that document significant additions or deletions of major responsibilities. Because of possible grade impact and issues concerning merit promotion regulations, it's wise for supervisors to talk to their classification specialists before undertaking such changes.

Classifiers’ Responsibilities -- Classification specialists determine the proper title occupational series and grade of positions in accordance with Office of Personnel Management classification standards. Consistent with Human Resources quality objectives, classifier’s are expected to take a proactive approach with respect to advisory service on a broad range of classification issues and position management objectives for our customers.

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Classifiers are available for writing position descriptions as needed. In some instances, authority to classify positions may be delegated to supervisors and managers.

Under such an arrangement, the role of the classifiers focuses primarily on training to supervisors, technical advisory service, and oversight of the classification program.

If you have any questions about this article, please contact your servicing position classification specialist or, Doug Crews at Area Code 612-370-2169.

PATS/PRISM Usage by Customers

We would like to thank all of our customers that have been sending in their requests via PATS and PRISM versus using paper copies that are faxed, phoned or “snail-mailed” into our offices.

Our new system for submitting electronic Requests for Personnel Actions (SF-52s) and Purchase Requests (AD-700s) has been available since November. The system can be accessed through Lotus Notes or via the Web. System usage was slow when it was first implemented but has been increasing with each passing week. Here are some interesting statistics on the usage of PATS and PRISM:

Percentage of Requests Submitted via System

	<u>PATS</u>	<u>PRISM</u>
November	31.50%	9.11%
December	35.79%	16.26%
January	68.35%	31.20%
February	89.71%	43.99%

As you can see, more and more customers are using the new system. We have received many favorable comments on the system functionality and ease of use. The Web version functionality has been improved since implementation to assist customers in retrieving and printing their requests.



We would like to encourage all of our customers who haven't used the system to give it a try. As the old saying goes....***Try it, you'll like it!*** If you need information on how to access and use the systems, please check out the information on our Web Site (www.aphis.usda.gov/mps/). (**Note:** PATS statistics reflect submissions to all three Servicing Personnel Offices-Minneapolis, Riverdale and Washington, DC)

PATS/PRISM Information Help Line

Beginning in April, you will be able to get any questions answered about our automated systems, just by dialing the PATS/PRISM help line. A voice menu system will get you to the person that can best solve your PATS or PRISM problem. There will also be a menu selection to ask a question about any of our other applications. Just give us a call at Area Code 612-370-2396, beginning April 3rd. We look forward to helping you get the answers you need.

New FFIS Billing System

A new accounting system called Foundation Financial Information System (FFIS), is being implemented USDA wide over the next several years. APHIS is scheduled for implementation **October 1, 2000**. This new system will have an effect on the current billing and collection process in APHIS.

In December, 1999, all of our APHIS customers that have accounts (veterinary services user fees, PPQ reimbursable overtime, and agricultural quarantine inspection user fees), received a letter asking for verification of their federal tax identification number. The letter explained that the new FFIS billing system scheduled to start October, 2000, will incorporate their tax id's into account numbers.

The new billing system will no longer use the account numbers previously established for our customer, such as '3' for VS accounts and '8' for PPQ ROT. Approximately 5,700 accounts will be affected by this change. In order to get all of the tax id's into the new billing system, the Accounts Receivable team started gathering information this past January and the responses are being updated.

We anticipate extensive testing of the new account numbers prior to their final incorporation into the FFIS system. The Accounts Receivable Team will keep you updated of future changes that will affect you and when they will occur. For any questions, please contact our toll free number 1-888-616-7595, extension 2291.

FTS2001 and MCI WorldCom

If you have received the MCI WorldCom Invoices and Management Reports and have questions about them, we have the information to explain what they are, what you should do with them, and who to contact for more information.

If you'd like to talk with us in person, please call Diana Halsey at Area Code 612-370-2122, Michelle Fernandez at 612-370-2390, or Arlette Johnson, at Area Code 612-370-2229. If you have Internet access, please visit our Web page for the following:

- FTS2001 Voice transition to MCI WorldCom,
- Information on Phone scam,
- Automatic Payment Account at NFC for telephone bills,
- Links to Federal Telecommunications (FTS Home Page) for OASIS information, Hierarchy Data Charts, Video Conferencing information, Paging Services information, Calling Card information, and Remote LAN Dial-up information.
- Links to USDA Regulation DR3000-1 Telecommunications and the Telecommunications Act of 1996.



You can reach our Web Site by going to "**<http://www.aphis.usda.gov/mppls>**", clicking on "Services Provided", and then clicking on "Telecommunications". Or, you can go directly to: **<http://www.aphis.usda.gov/mppls/services/telcom.html>**.

Contracting Web Improvements

This is the first in a series of articles on Contracting in MRP-Business Site for AdNotes, and in this article, we'd like your help in improving our Web Site.

The changes in Contracting are coming fast and furious. Aside from staying current with the normal Federal Government changes (such as new regulations, reports, etc.), we are being challenged to keep up with technological changes. A significant portion of our efforts are currently devoted to developing and improving our Contracting Web Pages.



As radio personality Garrison Keillor might say, "It's a Pretty Good Web Page," but it can still stand a little tweaking.

Some of us are comfortable with the way we're doing things now, others are "chomping at the bit", to be on the cutting edge of e-commerce. The key question is, "How can we best meet your needs on our Web Site?"

You're all cordially invited to visit the "New" and "Improved" Contracting portion of our Web Site, at "<http://www.aphis.usda.gov/mpis/services/contr.html>". Please contact Jose-Luis Gallagher Area Code 612-370-2226 with ideas for further improvements, questions or comments. Our Lotus Notes addresses and phone numbers are also linked to the Web Page.

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Hello,

I'm **Donna Wilson** and welcome to another edition of AdNotes. I'd like to thank everyone who took the time to respond to my call for comments and concerns in our last edition. Your ideas were very helpful and led to us in making several changes. Please continue to give me your feedback by emailing me at "Donna.l.wilson@usda.gov" or calling me at Area Code 612-370-2188.

In this issue, we are trying a new way to organize AdNotes. The first section (pages 1 through 7) has articles that have never been published before, and the last three pages have already been posted on our Web Site. So, if you've been keeping up with our Web Site, you don't have to read beyond page 7.

Thanks for reading AdNotes. We appreciate your interest.

Donna Wilson
Editor



PATS Web Improvements

For those people using the Web Version of PATS (Personnel Actions Tracking System), the following improvements were made to our PATS Web Application as a result of your requests:

Printing Enhancements

- ♦ Printing an SF-52 with an ID number no longer requires saving to draft first. The print button on the SF-52 input form will now generate an SF-52 ID number. This saves over 10 steps for users. The printed SF-52 has been reduced from 5 pages to 2 pages.

Searching by Requestor

- ♦ A row of alphabet buttons have been added just below the Expand, Collapse and Search buttons for use when “searching by requestor” in Draft, Outbox and Tracking. Click on the letter of the first character of the name for which you are searching. The system will take you to the first name it finds that begins with that letter. Then, use the arrow down keys to find the appropriate name/record. You will need to know if you have entered the requestor as First Name, Last Name or Last Name, First Name.

Please contact your servicing personnel office with any new suggestions for improvement or for further information.



No More APHIS 64 Quarterly Reports

For those people that have been filling out the APHIS 64 Quarterly Reports, ***you have one less report to complete.***

As many of you know, the APHIS Vehicle Quarterly Report was not Y2K compliant, and the information that used to be collected through this report is now being collected automatically through the VOYAGER gasoline credit card. All of the information that went into the APHIS 64 Quarterly Reports will now be automatically collected at the pumps or at the service facility.

If you have any questions about this article, please call Ginny Madden at Area Code 612-370-2151, or Archie Crandall at Area Code 612-370-2006.



FY 2000 Accounting Data Transmission Dates For APHIS offices

With the implementation of FFIS scheduled for October 1, 2000, this will be the final fiscal year for submitting certain accounting data in the Central Accounting System (CAS). However, it is still necessary and important to continue submission of this data until CAS is retired. In addition, the Department has moved up cutoff dates for the monthly closing of the accounting cycle. Therefore, **please review these dates closely to ensure your data makes the below cutoff schedule.**

AD-718 Period End Estimates and AD-757 Accounting Adjustments

Casper Users: This data needs to be transmitted to the Minneapolis Business Site by 6:00 p.m., **cst.**, on the dates listed below in order to ensure inclusion in the monthly accounting reports.

Non-Casper Users: This data needs to be received at the Minneapolis Business Site by noon, **cst.**, on the dates listed below in order to ensure inclusion in the monthly accounting reports.

March	Wednesday, March 29, 2000
April	Wednesday, April 26, 2000
May	Friday, May 26, 2000
June	Wednesday, June 28, 2000
July	Thursday, July 27, 2000
August	Tuesday, August 29, 2000
September	Wednesday, September 27, 2000

AD-742 (Transfer Vouchers)

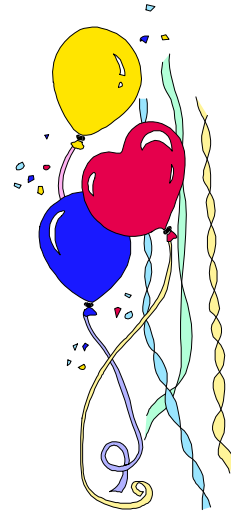
October	Thursday, October 28, 1999
November	Monday, November 29, 1999
December	Wednesday, December 29, 1999
January	Thursday, January 27, 2000
February	Friday, February 25, 2000
March	Wednesday, March 29, 2000
April	Wednesday, April 26, 2000
May	Friday, May 26, 2000
June	Wednesday, June 28, 2000
July	Thursday, July 27, 2000
August	Tuesday, August 29, 2000
September	Wednesday, September 27, 2000



These deadlines need to be met to ensure inclusion in the monthly accounting reports.

Federal Holidays in 2000

Federal law (5 U.S.C. 6103) establishes the following public holidays for Federal employees. Please note that most Federal employees work on a Monday through Friday schedule. For these employees, when a holiday falls on a non work day -- Saturday or Sunday -- the holiday usually is observed on Monday (if the holiday falls on Sunday) or Friday (if the holiday falls on Saturday).



Friday, December 31, 1999*
Monday, January 17
Monday, February 21
Monday, May 29
Tuesday, July 4
Monday, September 4
Monday, October 9
Friday, November 10*
Thursday, November 23
Monday, December 25
Monday, January 1

New Years Day (2000)
Birthday of Martin Luther King Jr.
Washington's Birthday
Memorial Day
Independence Day
Labor Day
Columbus Day
Veterans Day
Thanksgiving Day
Christmas Day
New Years Day (2001)

*January 1, 2000, and November 11, 2000 (the legal public holidays for New Year's Day and Veterans Day, respectively), both fall on a Saturday. Under 5 U.S.C. 6103(b) (1), if a holiday falls on a Saturday, the Friday immediately before is the legal holiday for employees whose basic workweek is Monday through Friday. For employees who do not have Monday through Friday workweeks, holidays are determined in accordance with 5 U.S.C. 6103(b)(2), 9b)(3), and (d) and Executive Order 11582 of February 11, 1971.